OPTICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF POLLEN GRAINS IN COASTAL WATERS OF THE GULF OF MAINE

Maureen D. Keller and Patricia A. Matrai
Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences
180 McKown Point Rd., P.O. Box 475
West Boothbay Harbor, ME 04575-0475
phone: (207) 633- 9600 fax: (207) 633-9641 email: mkeller@bigelow.org, pmatrai@bigelow.org
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LONG-TERM GOALS

In coastal areas, terrestrial material, including dissolved substances, can absorb a substantial fraction of the incoming light. We believe that seasonal inputs of pollen to coastal waters may contribute significantly to this terrestrial signal. We will describe the optical characteristics of pollen grains and determine if pollen leachates contribute to colored DOM. Eventually, we hope to assess the contribution of pollen to the optical signature of coastal waters on a seasonal basis and determine how light attenuation is altered in Case II waters where they are abundant.

OBJECTIVES

1. To characterize the optical signature of pollen grains.
2. To assess the confounding effects of pollen on typical phytoplankton fluorescence and absorption spectra.
3. To quantify the contribution of pollen material to the optics of coastal waters. Attainment of this objective will require an eventual field effort to determine pollen's *in situ* properties.

APPROACH

In Year 1, we collected mixed pollen samples throughout the flowering season for use in subsequent analyzes of optical properties. Based on the identification of the tree species which are the main source of pollen arriving at the shore, we will collect monospecific pollen samples in year 2, by placing the pollen collector adjacent to the dominant species.

In both years, we will be determining absorption characteristics using the glass fiber filter pad technique (Phinney and Yentsch, 1991 and refs. therein) to measure spectral particulate absorption of mixed and monospecific pollen samples. Absorbance is recorded between 250-750 nm on a Bausch and Lomb Spectronic 2000 spectrophotometer.   Backscattering properties of the pollen will be evaluated using a a Wyatt Industries Dawn laser, light-scattering photometer. This instrument measures the volume scattering function between 28 - 160° at 632 nm. These data can be used to estimate the backscattering coefficient. In the determination of both the

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absorption and backscattering properties, we will use a range of pollen concentrations.

We will also examine *in vivo* fluorescent characteristics using a Baird-Atomic spectral fluorometer.

To evaluate relative changes in phytoplankton absorption spectra due to the presence of pollen, we will prepare mixtures of different coastal phytoplankton species cultures and pollen in various ratios.

We will also evaluate the release of dissolved organic material (DOM), specifically yellow substances, by pollen grains, with and without exposure to UV wavelengths of light. Known quantities of pollen grains in artificial seawater, as well as a seawater control, will be placed in polycarbonate-screened and unscreened quartz bottles and placed in full sunlight, at a constant temperature. Dark controls will also be included. Samples will be taken over time to evaluate the release of DOM and determine its absorption and fluorescent characteristics. Samples will be filtered through a 0.2 µm filter and placed in a 10 cm spectrophotometer cuvette and measured on the instruments described above.

WORK COMPLETED

We set up a passive aerosol collection unit at Bigelow to obtain mixed pollen samples throughout the flowering season, and also collected material from surface slicks in shoreline waters. The pollen samples were stored frozen until they were filtered and examined microscopically. Pollen grains were identified and enumerated, and optimal concentrations for optical work were determined.

We determined absorption characteristics, using the glass fiber filter pad technique (Phinney and Yentsch, 1991 and refs. therein) to measure spectral particulate absorption of the mixed pollen samples. Absorbance was recorded between 250-750 nm on a Bausch and Lomb Spectronic 2000 spectrophotometer.

RESULTS

Samples were collected over the main flowering season (May - July) on a weekly basis. When pollen levels increased significantly, sampling was done more frequently. Samples were collected in two size fractions, 20 - 53 µm and > 53µm. In late June, the major release occurred and was dominated by pine pollen. Prior to that, there were smaller, defined releases of several other species. Pollen counts obtained from Eastern Maine Medical Center indicate that the pattern and magnitude of release were very consistent with those of the past five years. We knew previously that pine pollen was a major contributor, but now know that earlier in the spring, the pollen of multiple hardwood species are also significant components. Pine pollen grains ranged from 60-75 µm in size, while the other species were considerably smaller (25-35 µm). Although pollen samples have been counted and sized, we also collected samples for particulate organic

carbon (POC) analysis to be used as a comparative biomass estimate, since the traditionally used chlorophyll is not present in pollen. We currently estimate that a pine pollen grain has ca. 5 ng C.

Before beginning the optical analyses, we essentially performed a quench curve for the absorption spectra, determining the optimal amount of material to place on the filters. Due to their highly hydroscopic nature, we were also concerned about obtaining an even distribution of particles on the filters to be used in the analyzes.   Absorption and fluorescence spectra revealed that pine pollen grains appear to act as a long-pass filter, absorbing strongly in the UV and somewhat in the blue, and allowing the passage of longer wavelengths. There was a very long tail on the absorption spectrum, resulting in a fluorescent signal in all emission channels. The grains do have some autofluorescence, similar to flavin-like compounds. The absorption spectra of the mixed pollen samples were very similar, with peaks at less than 400 nm. In some of the surface water slick samples, there was a small peak at 680 nm, which we suspect may come from contaminating phytoplankton. It may be necessary to extract the pigments from these samples to get the specific signal from the pollen material.

IMPACT/APPLICATIONS

Remote sensing of ocean color from both aircraft and satellite platforms has the capability to quantitatively measure upper water column phytoplankton biomass if the signals can be quantitatively interpreted. The coastal waters of the Gulf of Maine are optically classified as extreme Case 2 waters, which implies that water-leaving radiance contains information on a complex mixture of optically-active substances. These include phytoplankton chlorophyll, phaeophytins and other pigments, phytoplankton and other detritus, suspended sediment, and colored DOM. To determine chlorophyll concentration with a high degree of accuracy, absorption due to competing substances must be accounted for and removed to isolate and quantify correctly the signal due to the phytoplankton. The accuracy of satellite systems cannot be tested without in-water validation, which must be done over a wide range of conditions - both seasonal and spatial - to come up with the best correction factors for the Case 2 algorithms under development. The seasonal wind-borne and river-borne contribution of pollen material to Maine and other coastal areas is significant. This material is likely to alter *in situ* attenuation in these waters and confound attempts to achieve an optical budget during the spring period. This work will provide information on pollen-specific optical properties and the relative importance of these yellow-colored particles in Case II waters.

TRANSITIONS

None at this time.

RELATED PROJECTS

Two other projects in which Keller is participating are of relevance to this project:

1. NOAA/NESDIS Project: Development and Validation of Regional Time-Varying Coastal Marine Algorithms - Gulf of Maine - A Case Study.   (C.S. Yentsch et al, Bigelow; Keller - Associate Investigator)

Using the NOAA MARMAP cruises as a platform, optical properties of surface waters in diverse regions in the Gulf of Maine, including areas around river mouths, areas in which different phytoplankton blooms tend to occur, and areas where there are concentrations of yellow substances, are being measured.   The direct goal of this project is to provide validated Case 2 algorithms for implementation into the NESDIS ocean color operational products. Keller is providing information on phytoplankton community composition and size structure.

2. NOAA/NESDIS Project: Penobscot Bay Marine Resource Collaborative: Applications of remote sensing and geographical information systems for marine resources management in Penobscot Bay, ME. Task 7: Characterization of phytoplankton communities, primary production and detrital components in Penobscot Bay and their relationships to hydrography. (M.D. Keller, PI, A.C. Thomas, U. Maine, co-PI)

The primary objective of this project, which is composed of ten distinct tasks, is the creation of a Penobscot Bay GIS which will contain layers of information essential to understanding the ecological character of the Bay.   Our eventual objective is to contribute to the development of remote sensing techniques to monitor the Bay's primary production and for use in the management of marine resources (fisheries restoration and aquaculture activities). We will be measuring optically active substances within the Bay on a seasonal basis and these data will become part of the larger NOAA/NESDIS ocean color data files being compiled to develop coastal algorithms.

REFERENCES

Phinney, D.A. and C.S. Yentsch. 1991. On the contribution of particles to blue light attenuation in the sea. J. Plankton Res. 13, 143-52.